

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 NEW DE 18465 01 OF 02 271410Z
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 18465

EXDIS

FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM AMBASSADOR GOHEEN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (CARTER, JIMMY)
SUBJECT: OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING PRIME MINISTER DESAI

1. IT MAY BE HELPFUL FOR YOU TO HAVE SOME OF MY PERSONAL PERCEPTIONS OF HOW PRIME MINISTER DESAI LOOKS ON YOUR VISIT AND PARTICULARLY OF ATTITUDES AND CONSTRAINTS THAT ARE LIKELY TO GUIDE HIS APPROACH TO ISSUES THAT YOU WILL BE DISCUSSING. IN SENDING YOU THESE OBSERVATIONS, I HAVE SOUGHT TO SUPPLEMENT RATHER THAN TO DUPLICATE THOSE CONTAINED IN THE "SCOPE PAPER" PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE. THE LAST VERSION OF THE LATTER WHICH WE HAVE SEEN HERE SEEMS TO THIS EMBASSY TO BE ON TARGET IN ALL RESPECTS.

2. ATMOSPHERICS: BEFORE DISCUSSING THE PRIME MINISTER'S VIEWS, I WOULD LIKE TO ASSURE YOU THAT THERE IS WIDESPREAD POPULAR INTEREST IN YOUR IMPENDING VISIT TO NEW DELHI. YOUR POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO SOUTHERN AFRICA AND YOUR DECLARED INTEREST IN INDIA AND IN THE PROBLEMS OF THE THIRD WORLD HAVE WON MUCH APPROVAL HERE. MORE PARTICULARLY, YOUR VISIT IS SEEN TO MARK A RECOGNITION OF INDIA'S PLACE IN THE WORLD, A WELCOME AFFIRMATION OF
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 18465 01 OF 02 271410Z

SHARED DEMOCRATIC VALUES, AND THE LAUNCHING OF A NEW ERA OF GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES. AS THESE STATEMENTS IMPLY, POPULAR EXPECTATIONS SEEM TO BE GENERAL RATHER THAN SPECIFIC. THERE APPEARS NOW TO BE LITTLE SPECULATION THAT YOU WILL COME OFFERING ANY BIG HANDOUTS. IN RECENT DAYS THERE HAVE BEEN INCREASED EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN IN THE PARLIAMENT AND IN THE PRESS

THAT YOU MIGHT TRY TO EXACT CONCESSIONS FROM INDIA ON NUCLEAR MATTERS THAT WOULD CHALLENGE INDIA'S SOVEREIGNTY AND INHIBIT HER DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR ENERGY. THE GOVERNMENT'S SPOKESMEN HAVE REITERATED THAT INDIA WILL NOT BE COERCED IN THESE MATTERS, AND MOST POPULAR OPINION SEEMS TO BE THAT OUR DIFFERENCES OVER NUCLEAR POLICY WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO SPOIL "THE NEW BEGINNING" IN CORDIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

3. IN PRIME MINISTER DESAI'S MIND, YOUR VISIT IS AN IMPORTANT COUNTER-BALANCE TO HIS RECENT VISIT TO MOSCOW. IT CAPS, AS IT WERE, HIS EFFORT TO ESTABLISH A FOREIGN POLICY OF "GENUINE NON-ALIGNMENT" AND HAVE IT RECOGNIZED AS SUCH. HIS AIM IN "GENUINE NON-ALIGNMENT", WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE WORD "GENUINE", IS AN INDIA THAT IS ON EQUALLY GOOD TERMS WITH THE MAJOR POWERS AND ONE THAT IS ACCEPTED BY THEM AS A SOVERIGN EQUAL, NOT REGARDED AS DEPENDENT OR TIED INTO ANY "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP". THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT IDEOLOGICALLY THE PRIME MINISTER IS MORE IN TUNE WITH THE UNITED STATES AND THE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES THAN WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND OTHER COMMUNIST NATIONS. BUT HE DOES NOT WANT INDIA TO GET CAUGHT AGAIN IN EITHER AN IDEOLOGICAL OR POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST. ABOVE ALL, HE WISHES TO ESTABLISH AND HAVE RECOGNIZED INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE
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PAGE 03 NEW DE 18465 01 OF 02 271410Z

AND INTEGRITY.

4. AS YOU KNOW FROM HIS CORRESPONDENCE, THE PRIME MINISTER FEELS THAT YOU AND HE SHARE VERY BASIC RELIGIOUS AND MORAL VALUES. HE HOPES, I BELIEVE, THAT THESE CAN HELP TO BUILD NOT SIMPLY GOOD RELATIONS BUT FRIENDSHIP, MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. HE WILL THEREFORE BE MOST INTERESTED WHETHER YOU PERCEIVE INDIA'S BEST INTERESTS AS HE DOES. THEREFORE LET ME EXPAND A LITTLE MORE ON THIS MATTER OF NON-ALIGNMENT. THE PRIME MINISTER BELIEVES THAT IN BOTH ITS INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS EXTERNAL RELATIONS, INDIA SHOULD CHOOSE ITS OWN COURSE AND MAKE ITS OWN DESTINY TO THE FULLEST EXTENT POSSIBLE. HENCE HE FREQUENTLY CITES THE VIRTUES OF SELF-RELIANCE AND FEARLESSNESS AND OPPOSES INDIA CONSIDERING ITSELF A PART OF ANY BLOC. THIS DESIRE TO HAVE INDIA STAND ON ITS OWN FEET APPLIES TO ITS POSITION IN THE SO-CALLED NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT, THE GROUP OF 77, AND AMONG THE DEMOCRACIES. BUT IT DOES NOT PRECLUDE WORKING TO ADVANCE COMMON INTERESTS WITH ANY OR ALL OF THE FOREGOING; NEITHER, IN PRACTICAL TERMS, IS THE PRIME MINISTER

LIKELY TO FIND IT IN INDIA'S SELF-INTEREST TO TAKE STRONG, OVERT POSITIONS AGAINST MAJORITIES IN EITHER THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT OF THE GROUP OF 77.

5. A PARALLEL VIEW, HELD AS A MATTER OF BOTH PRINCIPLE AND PRUDENCE, IS THAT EACH NATION HAS A RIGHT TO DETERMINE ITS OWN FORM OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION. CONSEQUENTLY, EXCEPT WHERE PATENT RACISM IS INVOLVED (E.G., IN SOUTHERN AFRICA), THE PRIME MINISTER BELIEVES THAT INDIA SHOULD FOREGO CRITICISM OF OTHER SOCIETIES. HIS RESERVATIONS ON THIS SCORE EXTEND TO THE EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RIGHTS THAT WE HAVE INSERTED INTO AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, EVEN THOUGH HE HIMSELF HAS BEEN A VERY ST
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PAGE 04 NEW DE 18465 01 OF 02 271410Z

ONG CHAMPION FO HUMAN RIGHTS WITHIN THE INDIAN SOCIETY FOR MANY, MANY YEARS. THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD NOT HOLD THE JOB HE HAS UNLESS THERE WERE STRONG STREAKS OF PRAGMATISM AND PRACTICALITY IN HIM ALONGSIDE HIS DEEP MORAL IDEALISM. A DESIRE NOT TO ANTAGONIZE THE SOVIETS AND ENDANGER THEIR ARMS SUPPLY TO INDIA SEEMS TO ME CLEARLY TO BE AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE RESERVATIONS JUST CITED. LIKEWISE, INDIA UNDER HIS DIRECTION REMAINS MORE THAT SCRUPULOUS ABOUT NOT DOING OR SAYING ANYTHING THE MIGHT SEEM PRO-ISRAEL AND SO ENDANGER ITS RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB STATES AS OIL SUPPLIERS AND AS POTENTIAL SUPPORTERS OF MOSLEM PAKISTAN AGAINST INDIAN INTERESTS.

6. THE PRIME MINISTER HEADS A CABINET THAT IS STILL A COLLECTION OF MEN WITH DIFFERING VIEWS, LOYALTIES, AND EMBITIONS, RATHER THAN A COHESIVE ENTITY. - WITH RESPECT TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS, IN COMPANY WITH FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE HE SEEMS TO HAVE ESTABLISHED, ALONG THE LINES INDICATED ABOVE, EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND CLEAR POLICIES WHICH HAVE GENERAL ACCEPTANCE OR AT LEAST HAVE ENCOUNTERED NO SERIOUS OVERT CHALLENGES. THE SAME APPLIES TO THE PORTFOLIOS WHICH THE PRIME MINISTER HOLDS FOR ATOMIC ENERGY, SPACE, AND SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. WITH RESPECT TO DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, HIS TECHNIQUE HAS BEEN TO GIVE THE SEVERAL MINISTERS GREAT LEEWAY IN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND TO TRY THROUGH PATIENCE AND CONSIDERATION TO HOLD TOGETHER COMPETING PERSONALITIES AND INTERESTS. THE RESULTS HAVE BEEN LITTLE REAL MOVEMENT TO DATE IN THE AREAS OF ECONOMIC POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT AND AN OFTEN MEDIOCRE ADMINISTRATIVE PERFORMANCE. THESE FACTS APPEAR TO REFLECT LIMITS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER PERCEIVES TO HIS POWER TO LEAD IN
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PAGE 05 NEW DE 18465 01 OF 02 271410Z

THESE AREAS RATHER THAN LACK OF CONCERN OR CONVICTION,
FOR WHILE HE IS RESPECTED BY HIS COLLEAGUES, HIS OWN
POLITICAL BASE IS NOT SUCH THAT HE CAN IMPOSE HIS WILL
ON THEM.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 18465 02 OF 02 271443Z

ACTION SS-25

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O 271139Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8296

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 18465

EXDIS

FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM AMBASSADOR GOHEEN

7. IN THE AREA OF NUCLEAR POLICY, THE PRIME MINISTER
TOOK A VERY COURAGEOUS STEP IN DECLARING THAT HIS
GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT PURSUE THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXPLOSIVE
DEVICES. HE MADE THAT DECISION AS A MATTER OF MORAL
CONVICTION, BECAUSE HE BELIEVES THE POSSESSION OF NUCLEAR
WEAPONS WOULD NOT STRENGTHEN INDIA'S SECURITY, AND
BECAUSE HE MUST ALSO HAVE BEEN CONVINCED THAT HE COULD
SUSTAIN HIS POSITION AGAINST DISSENTERS IN HIS OWN PARTY
AS WELL AS IN THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. WHEN IT COMES TO
THE ACCEPTANCE OF FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS, HOWEVER, MUCH
LESS CLEAR ARE BOTH HIS OWN PRIVATE VIEWS AND HIS ABILITY
TO SURMOUNT WHAT IS CLEARLY WIDESPREAD AND INFLUENTIAL
OPPOSITION TO SUCH A STEP WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY, IN THE
CONGRESS PARTY, AND IN INDIA'S SCIENTIFIC ESTABLISHMENT.

8. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS STATED PUBLICLY THAT HE WOULD
NEVER ACCEPT ANY AGREEMENT THAT WAS DISCRIMINATORY, OR
THAT MADE INDIA SUBSERVIENT TO AN EXTERNAL POWER, OR
THAT IMPEDED INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR SCIENCE AND

TECHNOLOGY. WHETHER HE CAN RECONCILE IN HIS OWN MIND
HIS DEEP CONVICTIONS ABOUT INDIA'S ENDEPENDENCE AND
SOVEREIGNTY AND THE ACCPETANCE OF SAFEGUARDS ADMINISTERED
BY THE IAEA, IN WHICH INDIA IS HARDLY AN OUTSIDER, IS
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 18465 02 OF 02 271443Z

SOMETHING THAT WE SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW. EVEN IF HE
SHOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE THIS RECONCILIATION PERSONALLY,
TWO THINGS SEEM CLEAR: (A) HE WOULD REACT NEGATIVELY,
OUT OF BOTH PERSONAL AND NATIONAL PRIDE, IF THERE WERE
ANY INDICATION THAT AMERICA WAS TRYING TO STRONG-ARM HIM;
AND (B) HE WOULD HAVE A HARD TIME OVERRIDING THE NOISY
AND PASSIONATE OPPOSITION THAT HE KNOWS A PUBLIC ENDORSE-
MENT OF FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS WILL AROUSE AMONG
MEMBERS OF INDIA'S POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL ELITES.
IF, THEN, YOU CAN MOVE HIM TOWARD THE ACCEPTANCE OF
FULL-SCOPE SAFEGUARDS, AS WE HOPE THAT YOU CAN, WE
BELIEVE THAT HE WILL NEED BOTH TIME AND ALL THE
PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTS THAT YOU CAN GIVE HIM TO BUILD
BROADER SUPPORT FOR THE STEP BEFORE HE CAN ANNOUNCE IT
AS A MATTER OF PUBLIC POLICY.

9. ONE THING NOT ADEQUATELY RECOGNIZED IN THE " SCOPE
PAPER" IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH CHINA FIGURES IN THE
RATIONALIZATIONS OF INDIA'S LEADERS. ON THE NON-
PROLIFERATION FRONT , THE PRIME MINISTER IS LIKELY TO
ASK YOU WHAT OUR GOVERNMENT IS DOING TO DETER CHINA
FROM THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THE
IMPLICATION USUALLY IS THAT IF THE WESTERN POWERS ARE
NOT LEANING ON CHINA TO FOREGO NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION,
THEY SHOULD NOT BE LEANING ON A PEACE-LOVING COUNTRY
LIKE INDIA WHICH HAS RENOUNCED NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS.

10. ON THE INDIAN OCEAN I HAVE NOT FOUND EITHER THE
PRIME MINISTER OR THE FOREIGN MINISTER TO BE ASSERTIVE
ABOUT THE IDEA OF AN INDIAN OCEAN ZONE OF PEACE.
PRIVATELY THEY HAVE BEEN BOTH RELAXED ABOUT AND APPRECIATIVE OF
THE BILATERAL US-USSR TALKS, ALTHOUGH PUBLICLY THE
GOI CONTINUES TO AIM AT THE REMOVAL OF ALL EXTERNAL
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PAGE 03 NEW DE 18465 02 OF 02 271443Z

MILITARY FORCES FROM THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA. INDIA'S
LONG-STANDING AMBITION TO BE RECOGNIZED AS THE DOMINANT
REGIONAL POWER AND A MAJOR FORCE IN THE WORLD, DOES, I
BELIEVE, GUIDE ITS LEADERS TO WANT TO BE THE MONITORS
OF THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE ASSURERS OF SECURITY IN THE

REGION, PERHAPS IN COMPANY WITH IRAN, BUT THEY ARE
REALIST ENOUGH
NOT TO WANT TO PUSH HARD FOR THAT OBJECTIVE NOW.

11. IF DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE BECOMES A SUBJECT FOR
DISCUSSION, YOU WILL FIND THE PRIME MINISTER A PROUD
MAN NOT LOOKING FOR HANDOUTS. HE IS UNLIKELY TO
PRESENT INDIA AS POVERTY RIDDEN; HE IS MORE LIKELY TO
STRESS INDIA'S STRENGTHS AND POTENTIALITIES TO WHICH
WE CAN VARIOUSLY RELATE IN HELPFUL WAYS, AS, FOR EXAMPLE,
THROUGH THE TRANSFER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. THE
RESUMPTION OF BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE, WHICH WE
ARE NOW DISCUSSING AT THE LEVEL OF \$60 MILLION FOR
FY'78, IS REGARDED MORE AS A POLITICAL GESTURE, AN
EXPRESSION OF GOODWILL ON BOTH SIDES, THAN AS A MATTER OF
MUCH ECONOMIC MOMENT. INDIA'S PREFERENCES FOR RESOURCE
TRANSFERS ARE THROUGH MULTILATERAL CHANNELS AND DEBT-
RELIEF, BOTH OF WHICH IT REGARDS TO ENTAIL LESS
PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDENCY. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER,
US AID THROUGH BILATERAL AS WELL AS THROUGH MULTILATERAL
CHANNELS HAS A PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE FOR INDIA BECAUSE
OF AMERICA'S WEIGHT IN THE CONSORTIUM AND THE IMPORTANCE
THAT THE INDIANS ATTACH TO OUR EXAMPLE THERE FOR THE
OTHER DONORS.

12. WE HAVE BEEN PICKING UP SOME INDICATIONS HERE, AS
HAS ALSO THE DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON, THAT THE DESAI
GOVERNMENT IS INTERESTED IN REDUCING ITS DEPENDENCE UPON
THE SOVIETS FOR MILITARY EQUIPMENT. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY,
HOWEVER, THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WILL SEEK TO ESTABLISH
A MAJOR ARMS SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED
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PAGE 04 NEW DE 18465 02 OF 02 271443Z

STATES UNDER CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES. HIS GOVERNMENT IS
WELL AWARE OF THE LIMITATIONS LAID DOWN IN YOUR ARMS-
SUPPLY POLICY BOTH AS IT APPLIES GLOBALLY AND IN THIS
REGION. INDIA'S LEADERS ALSO REMEMBER THE INSTABILITY
THAT HAS CHARACTERIZED US-INDIAN RELATIONS IN THE
PAST. THEY THEREFORE WILL BE RELUCTANT TO ASSUME ANY
SORT OF HEAVY DEPENDENCY UPON US UNTIL THE "NEW
BEGINNING" HAS SHOWN A PROVED CAPACITY TO PRODUCE A
FIRMER AND MORE CONSISTENT RELATIONSHIP THAT THAT WHICH
INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES HAVE ENJOYED OVER INDIA'S
THIRTY YEARS OF LIFE AS A NATION.

13. ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, I HAVE FOUND THE PRIME MINISTER
FRIENDLY AND EASY TO TALK WITH. WHEN HE FIRST STANDS
UP HE MAY MOVE SLOWLY, AS BEFITS HIS AGE, BUT THERE IS
NOTHING CREAKY ABOUT HIS MIND. IT IS CLEAR AND INCISIVE.
HE IS A MAN OF PRINCIPLE WHO SPEAKS IN A STRAIGHTFORWARD

MANNER AND EXPECTS HIS WORDS TO BE BELIEVED AND TRUSTED.
OCCASSIONALLY HE TENDS TO BE LACONIC; BUT HE LISTENS
CLOSELY; HAS AN ACTIVE, QUIET SENSE OF HUMOR; AND SEEMS
TO ENJOY THE GIVE AND TAKE OF DISCUSSION. MANY SAY
THAT HIS EXTENDED PERIOD IN JAIL DURING THE EMERGENCY HAS MELLOWED
HIM
AND MADE HIM LESS DOGMATIC AND
INFLEXIBLE THAN HE WAS EARLIER REPUTED TO BE. MY OWN
EXPERIENCE TENDS TO CONFIRM THAT HIS EXTRAORDINARY
INTERNAL SELF-DISCIPLINE HAS FEWER SHARP EXTERNAL
EDGES NOW THAN USED TO BE THE CASE. I FIND HIM VERY
MUCH AT PEACE WITH HIMSELF.
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